



Allegheny Brambles

An informational article about the Allegheny National Forest

United States
Department of Agriculture

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Can You Drive This Road?

And not receive a ticket from a law enforcement officer?



Look closely at the photo. The answer to the question of whether you can drive this road is ‘**NO**’. Even though the photo shows the gate as being open, the road is still **CLOSED TO ALL PUBLIC MOTOR VEHICLE TRAFFIC** *because the sign states the road is closed to public motor vehicle traffic.*

Obviously, the next question by any member of the public using roads on the Allegheny National Forest is “Why is the gate open when the sign says this road is closed to all public motor vehicle traffic? The answer is not an easy one, but let’s lay out the answer in a logical sequence. Roads are gated for reasons: 1) to protect a road surface designed to withstand a certain amount of traffic, 2) protect people working in the woods, such as operators of wood product sales or oil and gas leases, 3) to protect the public from damaging their vehicle on a road surface not designed for normal motor vehicle traffic, 4) to protect public and private property, and 5) to meet a specific resource management objective for recreation, watershed or wildlife.

When people working in the woods work at their jobs behind a gated area, they are working their jobs with the permission of the Forest Service. The Forest Engineers have determined that the road will withstand the use of the vehicles driven by the workers, and still protect resources and the road surface. These woods workers have the right to work and drive past the gate. In many cases, there's more than one worker making a living on a project down a road past a gate. And when work is busy, each of those operators will move in and out the road, past the gate, several times in a day. It then becomes operationally infeasible to keep the gate closed at all times. So, the gate is left open and the road is then *signed as closed to all public motor vehicle traffic*. Finally, when the job slows down or moves elsewhere, the gate on the road is locked closed again.

The meaning of this story is “**See if the Road is Signed Closed before You Drive Down the Road**”.

Because people working in the woods have the right to gain access to their jobs does not mean they have the right to go behind a gate on a closed road to gather firewood, pick berries, hunt or retrieve game, or any other personal use. Permission to travel past a gate on a closed road is for work-related activities only, and then only if Forest Service Engineers determine the road can safely withstand the traffic.

OK, you ask, what's the difference during hunting season? Another good question. The answer here is that any closed road **open for hunting of big game will have the gate locked open, AND the road will be listed on the Gated Roads Opened for Big Game Season list** that each Ranger District Office updates and distributes to the public every year. Due to the operational difficulties of opening approximately ninety roads every year for hunting season, the Forest Service locks the gates open on roads opened for hunting and distributes a list of opened roads to the newspapers and radio stations, but does not remove the closure signs.

Before you drive a road that appears to be open because the gate is open, do the following things:

- If gated, but the gate is open, check for signs saying the road is closed to all public motor vehicle use. If there is no sign, you can drive the road.
- If gated, but the gate is open, and there is a sign saying the road is closed to all public motor vehicle use, you may NOT drive the road. Park your vehicle where it won't interfere with emergency access, and walk in. The one exception to this is if the road is opened for hunting season and is on the list of opened roads available for travel.
- If there is no gate on the road and no sign prohibiting public use, you may drive this road.

- If gated OR if there is a sign stating the road is closed to all public motor vehicle use, you may NOT drive this road. Park the vehicle where it won't interfere with emergency access, and walk in.

If you have any questions at all concerning the legal access to a road on the Allegheny National Forest for BIG GAME SEASON, contact the Bradford (814/362-4613) or Marienville (814/927-6628) Ranger Stations.

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